

Biden open to compromise on infrastructure, but not inaction

By JOSH BOAK
Associated Press

President Joe Biden drew a red line on his \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan Wednesday, saying he is open to compromise on how to pay for the package but inaction is unacceptable. The president turned fiery in an afternoon speech, saying that the United States is failing to build, invest and research for the future and adding that failure to do so amounts to giving up on "leading the world."

"Compromise is inevitable," Biden said. "We'll be open to good ideas in good faith negotiations. But here's what we won't be open to: We will not be open to doing nothing. Inaction, simply, is not an option."

Biden challenged the idea that low tax rates would

do more for growth than investing in care workers, roads, bridges, clean water, broadband, school buildings, the power grid, electric vehicles and veterans hospitals.

The president has taken heat from Republican lawmakers and business groups for proposing that corporate tax increases should finance an infrastructure package that goes far beyond the traditional focus on roads and bridges.

"What the president proposed this week is not an infrastructure bill," Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., said on NBC's "Meet the Press," one of many quotes that Republican congressional aides emailed to reporters before Biden's speech.

Continued on next page



President Joe Biden speaks during an event on the American Jobs Plan in the South Court Auditorium on the White House campus, Wednesday, April 7, 2021, in Washington. Vice President Kamala Harris is at left.

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Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo speaks during a press briefing at the White House, Wednesday, April 7, 2021, in Washington.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

"It's a huge tax increase, for one thing. And it's a tax increase on small businesses, on job creators in the United States of America." Biden last week proposed funding his \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan largely

through an increase in the corporate tax rate to 28% and an expanded global minimum tax set at 21%. But he said Wednesday he was willing to accept a rate below 28% so long as the projects are financed and taxes are not increased on

people making less than \$400,000.

"I'm willing to listen to that," Biden said. "But we gotta pay for this. We gotta pay for this. There's many other ways we can do it. But I am willing to negotiate. I've come forward with the best, most rational way, in my view the fairest way, to pay for it, but there are many other ways as well. And I'm open."

He stressed that he had been open to compromise on his \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief plan, but Republicans never budged beyond their \$600 billion counteroffer.

"If they'd come forward with a plan that did the bulk of it and it was \$1.3 billion or four ... that allowed me to have pieces of all that was in there, I would have been prepared to compromise," Biden said. "But they didn't.

They didn't move an inch. Not an inch."

The president added that America's position in the world was incumbent on taking aggressive action on modern infrastructure that serves a computerized age. Otherwise, the country would lose out to China in what he believes is a fundamental test of democracy. Republican lawmakers counter that higher taxes would make the country less competitive globally.

"You think China is waiting around to invest in this digital infrastructure or on research and development? I promise you. They are not waiting. But they're counting on American democracy, to be too slow, too limited and too divided to keep pace."

His administration on Wednesday was pressing the case for tax increases. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said it was "self-defeating" for then-President Donald Trump to assume that cutting the corporate tax rate to 21% from 35% in 2017 would make the economy more competitive and unleash growth. Yellen said that competing on tax rates came at the expense of investing in workers.

"Tax reform is not a zero-sum game," she told reporters on a call. "Win-win is an overused phrase, but we have a win-win in front of us now." Yellen said the tax increases would produce roughly \$2.5 trillion in revenues over 15 years, enough to cover the eight years' worth of infrastructure investments being proposed. The roughly \$200 billion gap between how much the taxes would raise and how much the administration wants to spend suggests there is space to address critics, such as West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, a key Democratic vote, who would prefer a 25% rate.

Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo said businesses and lawmakers should come to the bargaining table, noting that there could be room to negotiate on the rate and timeline.

"There is room for compromise," Raimondo said at a White House briefing. "What we cannot do, and what I am imploring the business community not to do, is to say, 'We don't like 28. We're walking away. We're not discussing.'"

Key to the Biden administration's pitch is bringing corporate tax revenues closer to their historic levels, rather than raising them to new highs that could make U.S. businesses less competitive globally.

Trump's 2017 tax cuts halved corporate tax revenues to 1% of gross domestic product, which is a measure of the total income in the economy. Revenues had previously equaled 2% of GDP. That higher figure is still below the 3% average of peer nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Treasury Department said in its summary of the plan.

Still, some say the administration's claim is misleading. "The administration should use statistics that directly measure the burden on the corporate sector," said Kyle Pomerleau, a fellow at the conservative American Enterprise Institute. "In fact, many measures of effective tax rates show that the U.S.'s burden is pretty close to middle of the road. Biden's plan would certainly push up to the high end among our major trading partners."

Business groups such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Business Roundtable argue that higher taxes would hurt U.S. companies operating worldwide and the wider economy. □

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More than a half million Americans gain coverage under Biden

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than a half million Americans have taken advantage of the Biden administration's special health insurance sign-up window keyed to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government announced Wednesday in anticipation that even more consumers will gain coverage in the coming months.

The reason officials expect sign-ups to keep growing is that millions of people became eligible effective Apr. 1 for pumped-up subsidies toward their premiums under President Joe Biden's coronavirus relief legislation. The special sign-up opportunity for Affordable Care Act plans will be available until Aug. 15.

Biden campaigned on a strategy of building on the Obama-era health law to push the United States toward coverage for all. As president, he's wasted no time.

With the number of uninsured Americans rising during the pandemic, Biden



In this Feb. 15, 2021, file image shows the main page of the HealthCare.gov website.

Associated Press

reopened the law's health insurance markets as a backstop. Then, the virus aid package essentially delivered a health insurance price cut by making taxpayer subsidies more generous, while also allowing more people to qualify for financial assistance.

Those sweeteners are available the rest of this year

and through the end of 2022. Consumers who were already covered by the health law at the beginning of this year are also entitled to the increased financial aid, but will have to go online or call to update their plan. People on average could save \$50 a month, the government says.

The numbers released

Wednesday by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services show that 528,005 people newly signed up for government-sponsored private plans from Feb. 15 to Mar. 31.

But those figures are incomplete because they cover only the 36 states served by the federal HealthCare.gov insurance market. Na-

tional enrollment will be higher when totals are factored in later on from states such as California and New York that run their own insurance websites.

The new report also showed that more than 870,000 people who went to the HealthCare.gov website or reached out to the call center were found to be eligible for Medicaid, the federal-state health program for low-income people.

Although President Donald Trump spared no effort to overturn the Obama-era law, more than 20 million people remained covered under it at the end of Trump's term. That number combines those with HealthCare.gov plans as well as low-income adults covered through expanded Medicaid. But with the economy shedding jobs because of coronavirus shutdowns, the number of uninsured Americans has been on the rise. Biden sought to stop the erosion, and hopes to ultimately reverse it. □

Decision strikes key parts of Native American adoptions law

By KEVIN MCGILL

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Parts of a federal law giving Native American families preference in the adoption of Native American children were effectively struck down Tuesday by a sharply divided federal appeals court, a defeat for tribal leaders who said the 1978 law was important to protecting their families and culture.

The complex ruling from 16 judges of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upholds a lower court's finding that the Indian Child Welfare Act's preferences for Native American families or licensed "Indian foster homes" violate constitutional equal protection requirements.

It also said some of the provisions of the law "unconstitutionally commander" state officials' duties in adoption matters.

However, the full implica-

tions of the decision on adoptive children in this and future cases were not immediately clear. Some of the key points were the result of 8-8 votes. The lack of a majority meant the lower court's ruling prevailed on those points, but that no binding precedent was set by the appeals court.

Attorneys for both sides were reviewing the 325 pages late Tuesday. The case could wind up at the Supreme Court.

The 1978 law has long been championed by Native American leaders as a means of preserving Native American families and culture. In arguments last year, an Interior Department lawyer said Congress passed the law after finding that adoption standards at the state level were resulting in the breakup of American Indian families.

Opponents of the law include non-Native families

who have tried to adopt American Indian children in emotional legal cases.

"Our clients brought this case to protect their families from being torn apart by a discriminatory federal law," Matthew D. McGill, lead attorney for the plaintiff families, said in an email. "We are very pleased that today's ruling has confirmed that ICWA's discriminatory placement preferences are unconstitutional."

Multiple couples seeking to adopt Native American children, a woman who wishes for her Native American biological child to be adopted by non-Natives, and the states of Texas, Louisiana, and Indiana were among the plaintiffs challenging the law.

The Tuesday evening ruling marked a reversal for the appeals court. A three-judge panel voted 2-1 to reverse the district court



Rosa Soto Alvarez, of Tucson,, holds a flag of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe as she and other Native Americans stand outside the federal appeals court in New Orleans, Wednesday, Jan. 22, 2020.

Associated Press

and uphold the law in 2019. But a majority of the 17-member court agreed to rehear the case. With one member recused, 16 judges heard arguments in the case last year.

The resulting decision included multiple partial dissents and partially con-

curing opinions. On some issues, a majority of the court agreed. On others, the court tied, meaning the original district court decision on the issue prevailed, although the appeals court ruling on the issues won't be considered precedential in future cases. □

6 charged in NH youth detention center sex abuse probe

By **HOLLY RAMER**

Associated Press

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) —

Six former staffers at New Hampshire's state-run youth detention center were arrested Wednesday in connection with the abuse of 11 children over the course of a decade, including one who continued working with children for nearly 20 years after he is accused of holding a boy down while colleagues raped him.

The Sununu Youth Services Center, formerly known as the Youth Development Center, has been under investigation since July 2019, when two former counselors were charged with raping a teenage boy 82 times in the 1990s.

Those charges were dropped last year in order to strengthen the expanded investigation, but both men were arrested again Wednesday and charged with rape, the attorney general's office said. Two others also were charged with rape, while other two were charged with being accomplices to rape. The allegations span from 1994 to 2005.

"Today's arrests make clear that this administration is committed to hold-



This combo of undated handout booking photo provided by the New Hampshire Attorney General's office shows, from top row left, Bradley Asbury, Jeffrey Buskey and Frank Davis; bottom row from left, Lucien Poulette, James Woodlock and Stephen Murphy. The six men were arrested Wednesday, April 7, 2021, in connection with sexual abuse allegations at New Hampshire's state-run youth detention center, the attorney general's office said.

Associated Press

ing these perpetrators accountable for their detestable actions," said Gov. Chris Sununu. "This is not over, and we will continue to investigate these horrific allegations."

The center is named for former Gov. John H. Sununu,

father of the current governor.

Several of those arrested Wednesday were previously named in a civil lawsuit filed last year in which more than 200 men and women allege they were physically or sexually abused as chil-

dren by 150 staffers at the Manchester facility from 1963 to 2018. According to their attorney, children were gang raped by counselors, beaten while raped, forced to compete for food in "fight clubs" set up by counselors and locked in solitary confinement for weeks or months.

"My clients are thrilled that the state has taken the important next step in holding these men criminally responsible for the unspeakable crimes they have committed," attorney Rus Rilee said. "We have faith that this is just the beginning of the arrests and indictments of not only all of the perpetrators, but also all of those that allowed it to happen."

The new arrestees include Lucien Poulette, 65, of Auburn, who is charged with 33 counts — including rape and sexual assault — involving seven victims between 1994 and 2005. Bradley Asbury, 66, of Dunbarton, is charged with being an accomplice to the rape of a former resident between 1997 and 1998. And Frank Davis, 79, of Hopkinton, is charged with one count of rape and five counts of sexual assault involving two

victims between 1996 and 1997.

Instead of the dozens of charges they previously faced, Jeffrey Buskey, 54, of Quincy, Massachusetts, is now charged with five counts of rape involving four children between 1996 and 1999, while Stephen Murphy, 51, of Danvers, Massachusetts, is charged with five counts of rape involving three children between 1997 and 1999.

James Woodlock, 56, of Manchester, was charged with three counts of being an accomplice to rape between 1997 and 1998. David Meehan, the lead plaintiff in the civil lawsuit, alleges that Woodlock repeatedly beat him, held him down while Buskey raped him and told him he had "simply misunderstood events" when he spoke up during a group counseling session.

Woodlock later left the Youth Development Center job and became a juvenile probation and parole officer, a position he held until he went out on leave in 2017. He declined to comment on Meehan's allegations when a reporter visited his home in early 2020.

Former Vice President Mike Pence memoir set for 2023 release

By **HILLEL ITALIE**

NEW YORK (AP) —

Former Vice President Mike Pence has a book deal. His autobiography, currently untitled, is scheduled to come out in 2023.

"I am grateful to have the opportunity to tell the story of my life in public service to the American people, from serving in Congress, to the Indiana Governor's office and as Vice President of the United States," Pence said in a statement. "I look forward to working with the outstanding team at Simon & Schuster to invite readers on a journey from a small town in Indiana to Washington, DC."

Simon & Schuster announced Wednesday that it also signed Pence to a second book but did

not immediately provide details. Pence is the first major Trump administration official to have an announced deal since the president left office in January, although former White House advisor Kellyanne Conway and former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo are among those reportedly working on books.

A Pence memoir will likely be subject to similar tensions the former Vice President has faced since he refused then-President Donald Trump's demands that he help overturn the election results. Among Democrats and others who opposed Trump, Pence is widely seen as Trump's loyal and complicated ally. Meanwhile, Trump

supporters, and Trump himself, denounced him for not intervening Jan. 6 in Congress' formal certification of Democrat Joe Biden's presidential victory. The certification — that Pence had no power to change — was delayed for hours after hundreds of Trump supporters, some chanting "Hang Mike Pence," stormed the U.S. Capitol.

Simon & Schuster Vice President and Publisher Dana Canedy said that Pence's book would be "revelatory," without specifically saying whether he would address the events of Jan. 6.

"Vice President Pence's life and work, his journey as a Christian, the challenges and triumphs he has



Vice President Mike Pence speaks during a memorial service for the late Air Force Brig. Gen. Chuck Yeager in Charleston, W. Va., on Jan. 15, 2021.

Associated Press

faced, and the lessons he has learned, tells an American story of extraordinary public service during a time of unrivaled public interest in our government

and politics," Canedy said. "His revelatory autobiography will be the definitive book on one of the most consequential presidencies in American history." □

Toronto schools shutdown amid third wave of infections

TORONTO (AP) — Schools in Canada's largest city will shut down Wednesday and move to online learning because of a third surge of coronavirus infections fueled by more-contagious virus variants.

Toronto Medical Officer of Health Dr. Eileen de Villa said in a statement stronger measures are needed to reverse the surge.

"The spread of COVID-19 has never been greater in Toronto, with variants of concern increasing both the risk of transmission and the risk of serious illness or death," de Villa said in a statement.

Ontario has seen seeing more than 3,000 new infections a day in recent days and record intensive care numbers.

The move follows a similar move by the neighboring Peel Region. The closures will be reevaluated later this month. Toronto has one of the largest school districts in North America.

Local health officials made the decision after the province declined to act. Ontario Premier Doug Ford, who said earlier that schools are safe, has been criticized by health officials



Manda Zand, right, hugs her grandmother Farang Ahmadkorour, 92, after she received her COVID-19 vaccine at the Seneca College mass vaccination site during the coronavirus pandemic in Toronto, Tuesday, April 6, 2021.

Associated Press

for not doing more to get infections under control.

Ford had refused to shut down shopping malls, but then admonished people for using them.

"Around the world, countries are facing a very serious third wave of this pandemic. And right now, so is Canada. This isn't the news any of us wanted, but hos-

pitalizations are surging. ICU beds are filling up," Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Tuesday.

He said he planned to talk with Ford "about what the spike in cases means for hospitals, and the importance of vaccinating as many people as possible, as quickly as possible."

Vaccinations have ramped

up in Canada in recent weeks and all adults who want a vaccine are expected to get at least one dose by July.

York region, just north of Toronto, is also a hot spot of new infections, but has decided to keep schools open.

"At the direction of Dr. Karim Kurji, York Region's

Medical Officer of Health, York Region Public Health continues to follow the provincial Reopening Framework prioritizing schools remain open throughout all levels, even during the province-wide "emergency brake shutdown," a York region spokeswoman said in an email.

Laura Barr, a 40-year-old teacher in Toronto, said she's relieved her district has ended in-class learning. Teachers at her school were teaching students in-person and online simultaneously.

"I was no longer feeling safe," she said. "It was very stressful trying to maintain distancing and other safety protocols in person while also interacting with students learning from home. I'm very relieved that schools have shut down; now I can focus on teaching without worrying that my health is being put in jeopardy."

She added she wished Ford had taken proper actions sooner to avoid a third wave. "It will be so hard for many families to make the necessary arrangements to adapt to remote learning with no notice," she said. □

Osaka issues virus spike warning, wants torch relay rerouted

By MARI YAMAGUCHI

TOKYO (AP) — Japan's Osaka prefecture issued a special warning Wednesday that a rapid surge in coronavirus cases is placing medical systems in the region at the verge of collapse and requested the cancellation of the Olympic torch relay along all public roads in the prefecture.

Gov. Hirofumi Yoshimura declared a "medical emergency" in the western Japanese prefecture, where daily cases have reached new highs, and asked hospitals to urgently prepare additional beds.

Yoshimura, who previously asked for a cancellation of the torch relay only in Osaka city, said all segments on public roads should be

canceled. The Olympic organizing committee said later Wednesday that it will hold the Osaka leg of the Olympic torch run, scheduled for April 13-14, at the

1970 Osaka Expo commemorative park.

The Tokyo Olympics are to start in just over three months with Japan's vaccination drive still in its initial

stages. Experts say more contagious new variants of the virus are becoming more common and are urging health officials to respond quickly to prevent an explosive increase with only a fraction of the people inoculated.

"Medical systems are on the verge of collapse," Yoshimura said at a news conference. He attributed the rapid spike in infections to a new variant of the virus. "Obviously it spreads more rapidly and it is more contagious," he said. About 70% of hospital beds available in Osaka are now occupied, the threshold for declaring a "medical emergency," officials said.

The measures come two days after Yoshimura is-

sued a set of special virus control measures for Osaka city alone following Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga's decision to place the prefectures of Osaka, Hyogo and Miyagi under a semi-emergency.

Osaka's neighboring prefecture of Hyogo is also facing an upsurge and has imposed special virus measures in four cities beginning Monday, along with Sendai, a city in the northern prefecture of Miyagi. Infections also have surged elsewhere in the western region, which experts say may require additional virus protection measures and stay-home requests, possibly leading to the cancellation of more torch events, a further setback for the Olympics. □



Osaka Gov. Hirofumi Yoshimura speaks next to a screen reading "medical emergency declaration" in Osaka, western Japan, Wednesday, April 7, 2021.

Associated Press

Iraqi PM grapples with militia threat as talks with U.S. start

By **QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA**
and **SAMYA KULLAB**

Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq's prime minister asked Iran's leaders to rein in Iran-backed militias in Iraq and in a strongly worded message to Tehran, suggested he would confront the factions, two Iraqi officials said Wednesday.

Mustafa al-Kadhimi's statement came as the fourth round of strategic talks with Washington got under way, the first under President Joe Biden. The talks — held virtually because of the pandemic — began in June and are expected to center on an array of issues, including the presence of remaining U.S. combat forces in Iraq and Iran-backed groups acting outside of state authority. Iraq had requested the latest round, partly in response to pressure from Shiite political factions and militias loyal to Iran that have lobbied for the remaining U.S. troops to leave Iraq. Participants include U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and Under Secre-



In this Sept. 8, 2016 file photo, a U.S. Army soldier guards a position at Camp Swift, northern Iraq. **Associated Press**

tary of State for Political Affairs David Hale.

Al-Kadhimi has walked a tightrope as he negotiates with the Americans while coming under growing pressure from local militias loyal to Tehran.

Last week, a convoy of heavily armed Shiite militiamen drove openly through central Baghdad, denouncing the U.S. presence

and threatening to cut off al-Kadhimi's ear, a display that clearly sought to undermine the premier.

Pressure has also come from cash-strapped Tehran as it seeks billions of dollars in payment for crucial gas and electricity supplies. Iraqi officials say the money is sitting idle in an account at the Trade Bank of Iraq because of U.S. restrictions

and fears of sanctions.

In response to the ominous military-type parade by the militias, Kadhimi sent a strongly worded letter to Tehran, demanding Iran use its influence to halt these groups, two Iraqi officials said.

In the note, al-Kadhimi threatened to "announce clearly who backs these groups" and said he was

willing to confront them, the officials said.

It was not immediately clear who the message was given to. The timing suggested al-Kadhimi, who has appeared powerless in confronting the militias, was looking to appease the Americans ahead of Wednesday's talks.

The message led to a two-day visit this week by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard's Quds Force chief Ismail Qaani to Baghdad, where he met with militia and Shiite political leaders and called for calm, according to a senior Iraqi Shiite politician. The two Iraqi officials and the Shiite politician all spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to reporters. □

U.S.-Iraq ties plummeted after a Washington-directed airstrike that killed Iranian Quds Force commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad last year. At the time, outraged Shiite lawmakers passed a non-binding resolution to end U.S. troop presence in the country. □

'We failed the test' of COVID-19, says human rights champion

By **LORI HINNANT**

PARIS (AP) — Agnès Callamard is best known for her investigation into the killing of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and has made a career uncovering extrajudicial killings.

The French human rights expert's focus on rights abuses is taking on new

dimensions as she assumes leadership of Amnesty International and turns her attention to what she says is one of the world's most pressing issues: vaccine equity to end the coronavirus pandemic, which has eroded freedoms globally. Amnesty International released its annual report

on Wednesday, arguing that governments have used the coronavirus pandemic as an excuse to clamp down on human rights, whether or not that was the original intent. The wide-ranging report took particular aim at governments in Myanmar and Russia, among others, but also critiqued the use of coronavirus-related police powers in places like Britain and the United States against protesters.

The only way to end the virus and the abuses that have accompanied it, primarily against the world's most vulnerable, is to distribute vaccines globally and equitably, she told The Associated Press on Tuesday.

"What we found is that the victims of COVID, whether it was in the U.K., in France, in the U.S., in India, in the Middle East, in

Brazil, those victims were primarily among the most disenfranchised and vulnerable groups," she said. "As a global community, as a national community, we failed the test that COVID-19 represented."

Callamard rarely hesitates to call out the powerful. In 2019, as a U.N. special rapporteur, she concluded there was "credible evidence" that Khashoggi's killing was state-sanctioned. She also investigated the U.S. drone strike that killed Iranian general Qasem Soleimani and concluded it was unlawful. Earlier this week, she said there was a real risk that Russia was subjecting opposition leader Alexei Navalny to "a slow death."

She said she will no longer lead her own investigations, as she has done for years for the U.N., but will continue to call out human

rights violations as she sees them. And the pandemic exposed plenty. Ending it, she said, will expose even more, especially among wealthy and powerful nations which have purchased more vaccines than they need.

"Not only do we buy everything, but on top of it, we stop others from being able to produce it. In the name of what? In the name of profit and in the name of greed," Callamard said, referring to the European Union and U.S. decision to block a proposal to relax intellectual property restrictions on patents related to coronavirus treatments and vaccines.

One of her proposals falls along the same lines as the Biden administration's call this week for a minimum global corporate income tax. □



Amnesty International Secretary General Agnes Callamard poses in Paris, Tuesday, April 6, 2021.

Associated Press

Cuban cooks overcome shortages with ingenuity on Facebook

By ANDREA RODRIGUEZ

Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — If you don't have potato, use malanga root. If you can't find zucchini, replace it with cucumber.

Can't find the ingredients you want? No problem: Yuliet Colón will help you whip up a dessert using the eggs you ran across, swap pork for the ground chicken in that recipe, even peanuts for beans in your Cuban-style rice.

She's among a number of Cubans who, with more ingenuity than resources, help their compatriots cope with shortages exacerbated by the new coronavirus pandemic with Facebook posts of culinary creations designed around what they're actually likely to find at the market or with government rations.

"I love Master Chef Spain, but where do I get liquid nitrogen in this country?" joked Colón, a 39-year-old mother of two and one of the creators of the Facebook page, "Recipes from the Heart."

The site, launched in June, now has more than 12,000



Contributor Yuliet Colon poses for a photo holding a pot of her creation, "Cuban-style pisto manchego," and her phone that displays the Facebook page, "Recipes from the Heart," in her home in Havana, Cuba, Friday, April 2, 2021.

members — many of them on an island just becoming accustomed to social media due to recently improved internet access.

The combination of COVID-19, which shut off income from tourism on the island, local economic productivity woes and sharpened U.S. sanctions imposed by former President Donald

Trump has led to increased scarcities in Cuba, where gross domestic product decreased by 11% in 2020.

Long queues became noticeable last year, and 2021 opened with government economic reforms that effectively raised both prices and pay — though not always at the same rate.

Colón last week visited an

agricultural market near her house and, after standing in lines for about 40 minutes, bought the few vegetables she found. She used them to create something that she called "Cuban-style pisto manchego" which includes onion, peppers, tomato, eggplant and cucumber — winning admiring comments from

other group members.

These days, Cuban household staples come and go without warning. When toothpaste appears, deodorant disappears, and when it returns, soap and the toilet paper have vanished. The same is true for rice, beans, milk, cheese, onions, tomato and or garlic. Fruit has not been seen for weeks.

Sometimes potato disappears, prompting Cubans to turn to other tubers popular in the region, yuca or rough-skinned malanga.

The Facebook site has become a home for proposals on how to chicken when it's the only meat available or create artisanal cheeses with others aren't available. "There are a lot of shortages", lamented Colón in the small kitchen of her house while she prepared her "pisto manchego," chopping the vegetables and photographing the process before uploading the images. She added a bit of fresh basil and oregano she took from a small flowerbed that a relative grows at the side of her house. □

Associated Press

Croatia police probe claim migrant sexually abused at border

ZAGREB, Croatia (AP)

— Croatian police said Wednesday they are investigating a report that an officer sexually harassed an Afghan woman during a recent incident at the border with Bosnia.

The police said an initial look into allegations col-

lected by the Danish Refugee Council group, and reported by The Guardian newspaper, found no police intervention against any female migrants on Feb. 15, when the incident reportedly took place.

"We are absolutely horrified by such allegations

and (that) such behavior is attributed to a Croatian policeman," a police statement emailed to The Associated Press said.

"Just like in all previous instances when Croatian police were accused of violence against migrants, immediate actions were taken to check the allegations."

The Guardian reported that on the night of Feb. 15 the Afghan woman was allegedly sexually abused, held at knifepoint and forced to strip naked by a Croatian border police officer, during a search of a group of migrants on the border with Bosnia. Nicola Bay, Bosnia director for the DRC, told the AP the allegation made by the unidentified Afghan woman were "truly horrifying." □



Migrants stand outside the Borici camp in Bihac, Bosnia, Wednesday, April 7, 2021.

Associated Press

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LOCAL



Ruben Maduro is conquering the rum world Part 2

THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS - Ruben Maduro entered the first cocktail bar four years ago with a bottle of botanical rum under his arm, and the rest is history. Today we read part 2 of this amazing Aruban adventure.

The setback: "Your company is like an affair"

That one cocktail bar with Ruben's rum on the counter became two, then five and then ten. "We had gold in our hands. There is such a thing as the first mover advantage. We had to act quickly before others would develop this idea." And for Ruben, the best ideas arise in the shower. "Early in the morning I am at my sharpest. I thought about the conversation I had in London, came to the office and told my then colleague: dude, we are going to open our own distillery."

Feelers out, looking for a property the size of a shoebox. "In the corridors I heard of a distillery that was for sale. Buyers had already registered. Then I put on the big pants. 'I know you are talking to another party,' I said to the seller who wanted to get rid of the property, 'but we have more money and a well-running brand.' In reality, I had no money and it all went well also not so well. I bet sky high and luckily there was no click between the company and the other potential buyer. 'We think you are a relaxed guest,' I was told. 'So, give us a call to our office.'"

Ruben from Amsterdam who wants to take over the toko of an



undisclosed international drinking giant? Easier said than done. "It was tough negotiations between me and that multinational. Ruben against a delegation of legal heavyweights, David versus Goliath. It went so far that at one point I said: this is my last offer and if you don't accept that, it's done. Man, I felt so lonely at the time."

A day later the redeeming bell came from his lawyer. The hard ball game had helped. "Your brand becomes your life. You have to give up a lot to achieve success. Like you are married to your job?"

No, it's more of an affair. You are in a relationship but your thoughts are with someone else. That has had an impact on me as a person. I lost a nice girlfriend that I thought I was going to marry. That's the other side of the coin. All your energy goes into that one thing."

"I see it as burning hoops that keep getting smaller. As the business becomes more stable, the hoops get bigger. But you can still do it." Ruben is referring to the corona crisis that also hit Spirited Union mercilessly. "Ten of our ten distributors called in one afternoon. 'Ruben, don't expect anything more for 2020.' What goes through your mind then? Everything has been for nothing. It was a deep valley with sleepless nights. But I did get good advice right away. Don't take it right away, but let it sink in for a moment and then make a rational decision. I took two weeks off, did some work at home. I really needed those two weeks." And that "shower moment" will come again later.

The growth: "Rum is definitely the new gin"

That moment did indeed come. Spirited Union Distillery had to change course. Because while the workshops and cocktail bar were put into a long hibernation, the

distillery in Amsterdam South continued unabated. Ruben and business partner Rogier managed to get the large Gall & Gall enthusiastic. "We first got 'no' ten times. They are of course called flat by brands. So, we decided to surprise them with a cocktail tasting. Rogier went to the office on spec on a Friday afternoon. A little later we did a nice bar take-over at a Berlin trade fair and we met representatives of Gall & Gall. With a bowl on, we asked them if they would finally come by. No sooner said than done."

A pilot of fifty Gall & Gall's at the beginning of last year turned out to be two hundred in November, and soon we will have three types of rums in four hundred liquor stores throughout the Netherlands. We have national coverage, bizarre!" It was a flying start to the year, says Ruben with a sense of understatement. Because where Spirited Union is rapidly gaining ground in the Netherlands, the brand is also conquering the rest of the world. A dozen European countries have already been supplied with Ruben's rum, New Zealand has recently agreed and there are plans to add Canada, Iceland, Hungary and the ABC Islands ("a home game for me") to that impressive list.

Continued on Page 9



Ruben Maduro is conquering the rum world

Part 2

Continued from Page 8

It is quite something for the drink that until recently had a dusty, old-fashioned image to it. We could say the same about gin about ten years ago. "That wasn't cool either, gin was a granny's drink." Is rum the new gin then? "I know for sure. The great boom of gin came about because producers decided to deviate from the manuscript. That is what we do now. You always kick a pair of shins, but the people who squeak the loudest also have the most importance that everything stays the same. Ba-

cardi of course wants us to keep drinking Bacardi. That brand has had a long time to talk to the consumer in a certain mindset."

This reform of the rum world has been more than successful so far. The botanical rum brands are popping up like mushrooms. Ruben doesn't seem to have any trouble with copycats. After all, it's about implementation, he says. "At the same fair in Berlin, we sat in the hall during a Havana Club presentation. That marketing director was actually telling our story. "Nice story," I told him afterwards. "Do

you know Spirited Union in Amsterdam?" He turned pale. It is nice when a multinational company sees the idea. Innovation comes from the little guys, not the big ones. We turned on something beautiful, Competition? Ultimately, the implementation is much more important than the idea."

"Sometimes amounts are put on the table to take over. You look your eyes out for a moment. It's naive to think you can build a global brand without help - that's what we want with Spirited Union - but I'm not going to hand over my

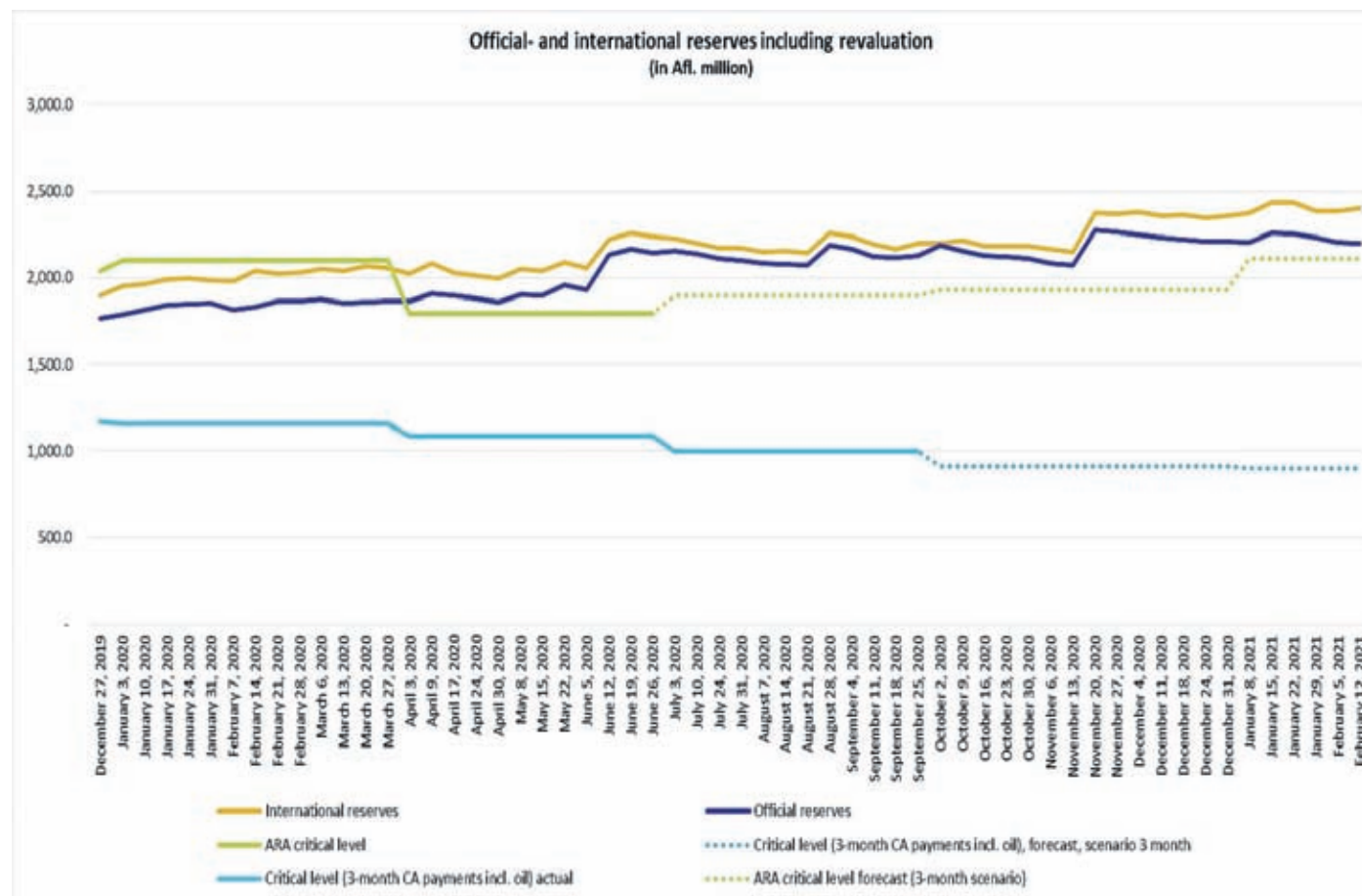


keys. We all do this with a small team, there is no big brand behind it and we really have the wind behind us. Simply gained the trust of one of the largest retail-

ers in the Netherlands. If that already works, what will not work?"

Source: Esquire.com

Centrale Bank of Aruba: Level of international reserves remains adequate



ORANJESTAD - During its meeting of March 2, 2021 and after reviewing the most recent economic and monetary data, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Centrale Bank van Aruba (CBA) decided to keep the reserve requirement at 7.0 percent. The reserve requirement refers to the minimum amount of reserves that commercial banks must hold at the CBA and is equal to 7.0 percent of their liabilities with a maturity less than 2 years. The following information and analysis were considered in

reaching this decision.

International reserves

International reserves (including revaluation differences of gold and foreign exchange holdings), up to and including February 12, 2021, strengthened by Afl. 47.7 million compared to the end of December 2020. This expansion was primarily the result of external financing received by the government during the first month of the year and inflows related to tourism services, and other external financ-

ing. Meanwhile, official reserves decreased by Afl. 9.1 million. Consequently, the official and international reserves reached, respectively, Afl. 2,198.8 million and Afl. 2,404.3 million as of the 12th of February 2021. Accordingly, the level of reserves remained adequate when benchmarked against the current account payments and the ARA metric by the IMF.

Credit developments

In January 2021, total credit grew by Afl. 18.0 million or 0.5 percent,

when compared to the end of 2020. This was mainly driven by the category 'business loans', which recorded an expansion of Afl. 27.5 million (+1.8 percent), as current account loans noted an uptick. Contrarily, the components 'other' (Afl. -4.7 million/-0.9 percent) and 'loans to individuals' (Afl. -4.8 million/-0.3 percent) contributed negatively to total credit. The category 'loans to individuals' fell mostly as a result of contractions in consumer credit (-0.9 percent), and to a lesser extent due to housing mortgages (-0.1 percent). Remarkably, housing mortgages noted their first reduction since January 2017.

Inflation

The CPI was 2.7 percent lower in January 2021, compared to the corresponding month a year earlier. This was mainly attributed to lower prices in the categories 'household operation' and 'transport'. The 12-month average inflation rate continued its downward trend reaching -1.8 percent in January 2021. When excluding energy and food, the 12-month average core inflation rate stood at -0.4 percent in January 2021.

Prudential liquidity

The prudential liquidity of commercial banks (33.5 percent), which measures the amount of their liquid assets to their total net assets, remained at a comfortable level in January 2021, far above the minimum required prudential liquidity ratio (15.0 percent).

Medlab Aruba 'fit-2-fly': Covid-19 testing on the island

NOORD — While on vacation, the last thing you need to worry about is what to do or where to go for your COVID-19 testing. Many countries, including the U.S. require for all passengers heading back home to present with a negative test result for PCR or Antigen 72 hours prior to departure.

MEDLAB Aruba is an accredited ISO 15189:2012 OGA-LE 23-08 laboratory with over 30 years of experience on the island. The laboratory complies with the Department of Public Health of Aruba, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) requirements for COVID -19 testing. MEDLAB Aruba has been assigned as one of the private laboratories authorized to perform "Fit-2-Fly" testing for departing passengers.

Hassle free scheduling – QR-code
The laboratory has invested on the only fully integrated digital booking platform on the island that allows guests to pre-register for the testing prior to coming to Aruba and have all their information incorporated upon entry to any of the available testing centers. Guests will receive a confirmation email with QR-code

that will be requested upon day of testing to facilitate a faster turn-around time for your results.

Testing options

Offering three method of testing gives you, our island visitors, the possibility to choose which service is at your convenience. Recommended time to complete test prior to departure is 48 (72) hours. We also request for you to bring your passport to the appointment.

Testing Option 1: Walk-In service at our location in Noord Medical Center (NMC), Noord 63 or at Superfood COVID Testing Center. You may also book online at WWW.COVIDARUBA.COM and choose location.

Testing Option 2: On-site at participating hotels. Only guests staying on these properties will be allowed to conduct the test. Appointment is also made online at WWW.COVIDARUBA.COM.

The participating hotels with testing facilities are Aruba Marriott Resort (Stellaris, Ocean and Surf Club), Holiday Inn, Playa Linda Beach Resort, RIU Antillas, RIU Palace, Eagle Resort, Costa Linda Beach Resort, Bucuti & Tara Beach Resort, Manchebo Beach Resort, Casa del Mar



& Aruba Beach Club, Caribbean Palm Village.

Testing Option 3: Airbnb/ Other hotel location. We come to you for the test together with our vehicular Mobile Health Test Unit. We require a minimum of six people for this service. Request/ Book appointment through WhatsApp number +297 5975548.

Price

Offering a great rate for the testing. The Antigen test is at \$50 and the PCR at \$100. Payment method is card (preferred), cash (hygiene measures).

The COVID Test is not covered by the Aruba Visitor's Insurance, but you are able to seek reimburse-

ment once back home.

Results

Turn-around time for results is within 24 hours. Result is sent electronically to your email (check spam/ junk folder)

For more information visit www.covidaruba.com, call us at +297 5975548 or email us at covid@lab.aw.

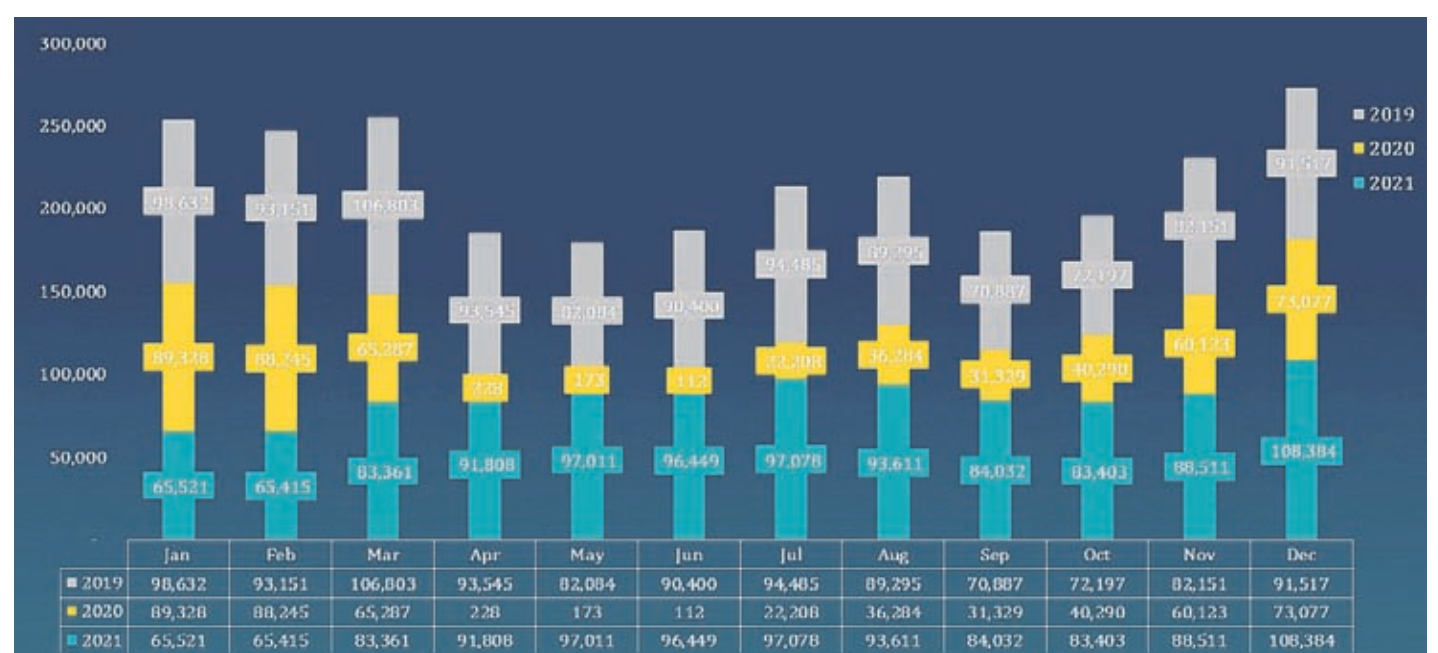


Confidence continues to build in the recovery with growth in airline capacity to Aruba: The Aruba sun is shining bright as more capacity is put in by the airlines the coming months

ORANJESTAD – Queen Beatrix International Airport (AUA Airport) is excited to report that that traffic numbers continue to rise steadily across AUA's busy skies, as air travel demand in the U.S. market picks up.

The total number of movements is expected to hit a new high with 151 flights and 15,932 arrivals over the course of the first full week of April 2021. The busiest day for arriving passengers is expected to be Saturday, April 10 when AUA Airport is forecasted to handle 3,500 arriving passengers and 30 aircraft.

The US recovery has been strong; total seat capacity reached 72% of pre-pandemic 2019 levels in the first quarter of 2021. Slowly but surely, data indicates that week over week capacity is recovering at least in the major regional markets. The key question remains "traveler confidence" as we look ahead into the second quarter of



the year. The industry further eagerly awaits news on vaccine passports and the global acceptance of such a program.

"We are excited to see that air travel is picking up in a very steady pace, especially from our main

market being the US. We are optimistic that U.S. carriers will reach pre-pandemic capacity levels by summer (April /May) 2021. We are also noticing an upward trend in the weekly passenger load factor upon arrival (percentage of occupied seats on board an aircraft),

increasing over the last weeks reaching a new high of 64% versus an average load factor in 2019 of 85%", said Aruba Airport Authority N.V. Air Service Development Manager Jo-Anne Meaux-Arends.

Fed in March saw brighter outlook, yet underscored patience

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal Reserve officials were encouraged last month by evidence the U.S. economy was picking up, but they showed no sign of moving closer to ending their bond purchases or lifting their benchmark short-term interest rate from nearly zero. Fed policymakers also said they expect inflation will likely rise in the next few months because of supply bottlenecks, but they believe it will remain near their 2% target over the longer run.

"It would likely be some time until substantial further progress toward" the Fed's goals of maximum employment and inflation at 2% are reached, and "asset purchases would continue at least at the current pace until then," the Fed said in minutes taken during its March 16-17 meeting. The minutes were released Wednesday after the customary three-week lag. Economists and market analysts are closely tracking the question of when the Fed might begin to reduce its \$120 billion in monthly



In this Nov. 6, 2019 file photo, Charles Evans, President and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, speaks at the Council on Foreign Relations, in New York.

Associated Press

purchases of Treasuries and mortgage-backed securities, since the Fed is expected to take that step before raising interest rates. Some analysts expect the Fed will start tapering its bond buys next January, and to take roughly a year to do so, before then

considering a rate hike. The bond purchases are intended to keep longer-term borrowing costs low. The Fed's policy making committee voted 11-0 at the March meeting to continue the bond purchases and keep its short-term rate at near zero. The Fed

last month also signaled it wouldn't raise rates until after 2023. Fed officials "generally expected strong job gains to continue over coming months and into the medium term," supported by low interest rates, the Biden administration's \$1.9 trillion emergency fi-

nancial package, ongoing vaccinations, and reopening businesses, according to the minutes.

Last month, Fed officials sharply raised their forecasts, projecting that the U.S. economy would grow 6.5% this year, up from 4.2% three months earlier. They now see the unemployment rate falling to 4.5% by the end of this year, below its earlier projection of 5%.

"However," the minutes said, "the economy was far from achieving (the Fed's) broad-based and inclusive goal of maximum employment."

Paul Ashworth, chief U.S. economist at Capital Economics, said that such comments indicate the Fed will likely continue its asset purchases through the end of the year.

Policymakers also underscored the importance of the Fed's new policy framework, adopted late last summer, which calls for the Fed to make changes in policy "based primarily on observed outcomes, rather than forecasts," the minutes said. □

Target to spend more than \$2B at Black-owned businesses

By **ANNE D'INNOCENZIO**
AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Target will spend a total of more than \$2 billion at Black-owned businesses by 2025 as part of its effort to advance racial equity.

That's a significant increase in overall spending on Black-owned businesses, according to Target, though it declined to be more specific Wednesday. The Minneapolis retailer will add a broad spectrum of products from more than 500 Black-owned businesses and will increase its spending at more Black-owned companies, from marketing to construction.

It will also introduce new resources, like a dedicated team to help Black-owned suppliers scale their businesses to work with mass chains. The Forward Founders program builds off Target's accelerator program that helps entre-



In this April 6, 2020 file photo, a customer wearing a mask carries his purchases as he leaves a Target store during the coronavirus pandemic, in the Brooklyn borough of New York.

Associated Press

preneurs.

Target and other corporations have been expanding ties with Black-owned suppliers, rethinking marketing and embracing other initiatives in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd last summer that led to protests nationwide against police brutality and racial inequity.

The trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin, charged in Floyd's death, continued Wednesday in Minneapolis. More than 20 companies, including Sephora, Gap and Macy's, have signed on to a nationwide campaign called 15 Percent Pledge, which aims to have companies commit to at least

15% of their products on their shelves to Black-owned businesses — in line with the U.S. Black population. Target's commitment is unaffiliated with that campaign.

Aurora James, founder and creative director of Brother Vellies, started 15 Percent Pledge as a non-profit advocacy group last year.

She said in an interview with The Associated Press this week that the biggest problem for Black-owned businesses is lack of access. James says her group is building a data base of Black-owned businesses that helps retailers and brands connect with Black entrepreneurs.

Kendra Bracken-Ferguson is a Black digital marketing and brand development specialist in beauty and wellness.

She has experience firsthand pitching Black-

owned brands to Target and other stores. She believes the spending commitment at Target will make a difference.

"Ultimately, Target is creating the pipeline that will fundamentally change how retailers must handle new brands coming into their stores," Bracken-Ferguson said.

Target said it has actively pursued more connections with minority-owned businesses, but is always seeking to improve operations.

"We have a rich history of working with diverse businesses, but there's more we can do to spark change across the retail industry, support the Black community and ensure Black guests feel welcomed and represented when they shop at Target," said Christina Hennington, executive vice president and chief growth officer in a prepared statement. □

'Tantalizing' results of 2 experiments defy physics rulebook

By **SETH BORENSTEIN**
AP Science Writer

Preliminary results from two experiments suggest something could be wrong with the basic way physicists think the universe works, a prospect that has the field of particle physics both baffled and thrilled.

The tiniest particles aren't quite doing what is expected of them when spun around two different long-running experiments in the United States and Europe. The confounding results if proven right reveal major problems with the rulebook physicists use to describe and understand how the universe works at the subatomic level.

Theoretical physicist Matthew McCullough of CERN, the European Organization for Nuclear Research, said untangling the mysteries could "take us beyond our current understanding of nature."

The rulebook, called the Standard Model, was developed about 50 years ago. Experiments performed over decades affirmed over and over again that its descriptions of the particles and the forces that make up and govern the universe were pretty much on the mark. Until now.

"New particles, new physics might be just beyond our research," said Wayne State University particle physicist Alexey Petrov. "It's tantalizing."



In this 2018 photo made available by CERN, Nikolai Bondar works on the LHCb Muon system at the European Organization for Nuclear Research Large Hadron Collider facility outside of Geneva.

Associated Press

The United States Energy Department's Fermilab announced results Wednesday of 8.2 billion races along a track outside Chicago that while ho-hum to most people have physicists astir: The magnetic field around a fleeting subatomic particle is not what the Standard Model says it should be. This follows new results published last month from CERN's Large Hadron Collider that found a surprising proportion of particles in the aftermath of

high-speed collisions. Petrov, who wasn't involved in either experiment, was initially skeptical of the Large Hadron Collider results when hints first emerged in 2014. With the latest, more comprehensive results, he said he is now is "cautiously ecstatic."

The point of the experiments, explains Johns Hopkins University theoretical physicist David Kaplan, is to pull apart particles and find out if there's "something funny going on" with both the particles and the seemingly empty space between them.

"The secrets don't just live in matter. They live in something that seems to fill in all of space and time. These are quantum fields," Kaplan said. "We're putting energy into the vacuum and seeing what comes out."

Both sets of results involve the strange, fleeting particle called the muon. The muon is the heavier cousin to the electron that orbits an atom's center. But the muon is not part of the atom, it is unstable and normally exists for only two microseconds. After it was discovered in cosmic rays

in 1936 it so confounded scientists that a famous physicist asked "Who ordered that?"

"Since the very beginning it was making physicists scratch their heads," said Graziano Venanzoni, an experimental physicist at an Italian national lab, who is one of the top scientists on the U.S. Fermilab experiment, called Muon g-2.

The experiment sends muons around a magnetized track that keeps the particles in existence long enough for researchers to get a closer look at them. Preliminary results suggest that the magnetic "spin" of the muons is 0.1% off what the Standard Model predicts. That may not sound like much, but to particle physicists it is huge more than enough to upend current understanding.

Researchers need another year or two to finish analyzing the results of all of the laps around the 50-foot (14-meter) track. If the results don't change, it will count as a major discovery, Venanzoni said.

Separately, at the world's largest atom smasher at CERN, physicists have been crashing protons against each other there to see

what happens after. One of the particle colliders' several separate experiments measures what happens when particles called beauty or bottom quarks collide.

The Standard Model predicts that these beauty quark crashes should result in equal numbers of electrons and muons. It's sort of like flipping a coin 1,000 times and getting about equal numbers of heads and tails, said Large Hadron Collider beauty experiment chief Chris Parkes.

But that's not what happened.

Researchers poured over the data from several years and a few thousand crashes and found a 15% difference, with significantly more electrons than muons, said experiment researcher Sheldon Stone of Syracuse University.

Neither experiment is being called an official discovery yet because there is still a tiny chance that the results are statistical quirks. Running the experiments more times planned in both cases could, in a year or two, reach the incredibly stringent statistical requirements for physics to hail it as a discovery, researchers said.

If the results do hold, they would upend "every other calculation made" in the world of particle physics, Kaplan said.

"This is not a fudge factor. This is something wrong," Kaplan said.

He explained that there may be some kind of undiscovered particle or force that could explain both strange results.

Or these may be mistakes. In 2011, a strange finding that a particle called a neutrino seemed to be traveling faster than light threatened the model, but it turned out to be the result of a loose electrical connection problem in the experiment.

"We checked all our cable connections and we've done what we can to check our data," Stone said. "We're kind of confident, but you never know." □

Conceptis Sudoku
By Dave Green

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	8				
3		6		5	1
7			8		
4		8			6
	9				2
8	2		6		7
			5		
	3	5 9	1		

Difficulty Level ★★ ★
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Classifieds

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British guitarist Thompson's memoir revisits golden rock era

By STEVEN WINE
Associated Press

In 1968, the year "Hey Jude" hit the charts, Richard Thompson turned down an invitation to Paul McCartney's birthday party.

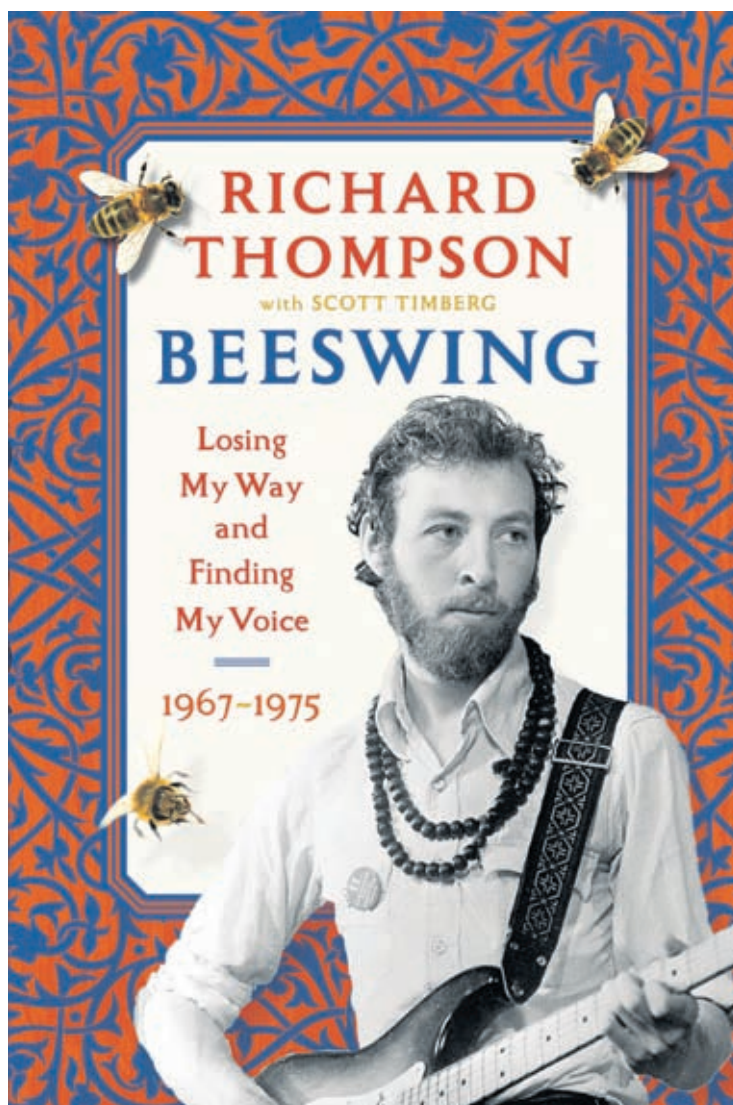
On other occasions over the years, Thompson shared the stage with Jimi Hendrix. He also pranked Buck Owens.

Those are among the fun facts found in Thompson's new memoir, "Beeswing: Losing My Way and Finding My Voice 1967-1975." The British guitarist and singer-songwriter, who has long had a small but devout following, revisits his role as observer and participant in a consequential era of rock music.

"I'd been wondering whether I was capable of writing something other than a three-minute song for some time," he said in an interview from his home in Montclair, New Jersey.

Thompson, 72, says he enjoyed writing his first book, which took three years. He chose to focus on the early part of his career in part because he's often asked about the 1960s and '70s.

"It does seem to have been an influential decade of music, and you're still feeling the reverberations of that now," he says. "People are still reverential about some of the legendary mu-



This cover image released by Algonquin Books shows "Beeswing: Losing My Way and Finding My Voice 1967-1975" by Richard Thompson with Scott Timberg. Algonquin Books via Associated Press

sic figures from that time." Many of those names pop up in "Beeswing" — also the title of a Thompson song that encapsulates the era. He was a member of the groundbreaking group

Fairport Convention, which brought rock to the British folk tradition, and British folk to rock. His subsequent musical partnership with his first wife, Linda, produced the sublime songs that have

served as the foundation of Thompson's solo career, including "Shoot Out the Lights" and "Wall of Death." Thompson laughs when asked why he said no to the McCartney invitation.

"I saw the Beatles and the Stones as being an older generation — all of five or six years older than we were — and not being particularly relevant to the kind of music I was into," Thompson says. "I was more into singer-songwriters at the time. I would have gone to Joni Mitchell's birthday party."

"I was being a real musical snob. I have to forgive myself for that. If he invites me to his 80th, then I'll definitely go."

Thompson's droll wit is evident throughout "Beeswing," especially in his account of Fairport's first U.S. tour. At one point, the band members were razed as long-haired hippies by several men in the next booth at a coffee shop in the Detroit airport. It turned out to be country music star Owens and his band, so Thompson introduced himself as a huge fan and asked for an autograph.

"Well... er... I... well... sure," the astonished Owens responded, according to the book.

Then there were the times

Hendrix, in London with his career gaining momentum, joined Fairport onstage.

"A little intimidating," Thompson says. "Even in '67, he was well-known around London as being this really great guitar player, this really interesting innovator who terrified just about every guitar player in town — including Eric (Clapton) and Jeff (Beck) and the whole gang."

"He was the nicest guy. He wasn't flashy when he played with us. It was like he wanted to fit in with the band, which I thought was kind of delightful really."

Kathy Pories, Thompson's U.S. editor for Algonquin Books, says he found a distinctive voice writing the memoir, while employing the vivid detail of a songwriter.

"He just didn't realize how fascinating his life really was," Pories says. "We would say, 'Tell us more about your childhood,' and then he would come up with all these amazing details."

"It feels very conversational, but also very emotional. It felt like he was sitting down and telling me about this period in his life."

Thompson writes candidly about the spiritual quest that led him to Sufism, and about relationships with his family, bandmates and Linda. □

Rhiannon Giddens considers the meaning of home



In this Tuesday, July 3, 2018, file photo, Rhiannon Giddens performs during rehearsal for the Boston Pops Fireworks Spectacular in Boston. Giddens' new album, "They're Calling Me Home," releases on Friday.

Associated Press

By STEVEN WINE
Associated Press

Rhiannon Giddens with Francesco Turrisi, "They're Calling Me Home" (None-such)

Rhiannon Giddens' new album masterfully mixes the music of Ireland, Italy, Appalachia and heaven.

A year of death and lockdown left Giddens thinking about home and all the word means. That inspired "They're Calling Me Home," a 12-tune travelogue that shrinks the world by covering lots of ground, with the great beyond always nearby.

Giddens and Italian multi-instrumentalist Francesco Turrisi both live in Ireland

and recorded the album near Dublin, which accounts for the set's Celtic underpinning.

Their reinvention of "Amazing Grace" possesses the gentle beauty of the Irish countryside, with Giddens' evocative humming supported by a frame drum and uilleann pipes. On the title cut she's mournful but hopeful, contemplating transfiguration and accompanied by an accordion's drone, while the somber ballad "When I Was In My Prime" will inspire another round at the pub.

The music never stays in one place for long. "Nenna Nenna" is a charming Italian lullaby, and the 1920s

fiddle tune "Waterbound" is performed as a campfire singalong, with stellar support from Congolese guitarist Niwel Tsumbu.

Banjo, viola and whistle further connect the musical roots, as does the powerhouse instrument that is Giddens' voice, her arresting alto vibrato soaring with amazing grace. □

5	6	4	1	7	9	2	8	3
2	1	8	3	5	4	6	7	9
3	9	7	6	2	8	4	5	1
7	3	6	2	4	1	8	9	5
4	5	2	9	8	3	7	1	6
1	8	9	7	6	5	3	4	2
8	2	5	4	1	6	9	3	7
9	7	1	8	3	2	5	6	4
6	4	3	5	9	7	1	2	8

NCAA may consider single site for part of future tourneys

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — The NCAA used the single-site concept for its marquee championship out of necessity.

Now it could become part of the tournament's future. A day after crowning a national champion for the first time since 2019, NCAA senior vice president of basketball Dan Gavitt told reporters that the successful men's college basketball tournament held primarily in Indianapolis and exclusively in Indiana could create a late-round model for future tourneys.

"If it's the desire of the committee and the membership to consider something along these lines for the future, I think we would give it significant consideration," he said Tuesday on a video call. "I would hesitate to say, though, I don't think a 68-team single site, short of another pandemic, would be something we would have great interest in. However, once you get down to a fewer amount of teams, say the Sweet 16 and on, having teams in the same location may provide some opportunities the membership, coaches and all would want to consider for the future."

Whatever happens, it won't be anytime soon — at least not by choice.

The NCAA already has awarded preliminary round games through 2026 and intends to play those games as scheduled, something it couldn't do this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic that forced everyone to rethink how they could safely host games a year after the tournament was scrapped.

Players, coaches and staff members were tested daily for the coronavirus throughout the three-week event. Seating capacity was capped at 25% in the six playing venues. Fans were required to wear masks and those in the closest contact with teams, deemed Tier 1 personnel, essentially lived in an NCAA

version of a bubble.

By almost any measure, the protocols worked.

Gavitt said there were 15 positive tests among the 28,311 conducted. The 66 games drew 173,592 fans, including nearly 8,000 Monday at Lucas Oil Stadium, where they watched Baylor end Gonzaga's perfect season with an 86-70 victory.

And though the television ratings for the Final Four were down from 2019, according to Sports Business Journal, the UCLA-Gonzaga game drew nearly 15 million viewers and was not only the most-watched program Saturday night



Baylor players and coaches celebrate after the championship game against Gonzaga in the men's Final Four NCAA college basketball tournament, Monday, April 5, 2021, at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. Baylor won 86-70.

Associated Press

but also the most watched non-football game since the pandemic began. Sure, there were obstacles. Six referees were sent home before the first game be-

cause one tested positive. Another ref, Bert Smith, was wheeled off the court during a Sweet 16 game after collapsing from a medical issue unrelated to CO-

VID-19.

Alabama student Luke Ratliff, 23, died after a brief illness just several days after he had attended a game at Hinkle Fieldhouse. □

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The color of Masters in April is missing a red shirt

By DOUG FERGUSON

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — From the dogwoods and their white blooms to thousands of azalea bushes bursting with purple and pink, all the April colors have returned to Augusta National except for one.

No red shirt.

Tiger Woods in his traditional Sunday color has become an indelible part of the Masters over the last 25 years. It dates to the practice round he played with Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus, after which Nicklaus suggested Woods might wind up with more green jackets than the King and the Bear combined. So there is a big void this year.

"You can't — especially at Augusta — you can't go there and not think about the guy," two-time U.S. Open champion Curtis Strange said. "Changed the game we knew basically in front of our eyes at Augusta."

The 1997 Masters — one year after Nicklaus made his bold prediction — remains a watershed moment in golf. Woods broke 20 records that week when he won by 12 shots as a 21-year-old in his first year playing as a pro. From there, he carried golf to a new wave of popularity and, because of television contracts that followed, made everyone around him richer.

The 2019 Masters was the perfect bookend. Four back surgeries, four knee surgeries, public embarrassment from his private affairs, and at 43 he overcame it all for his 15th major, fifth green jacket and pure joy when he scooped his son into his arms.

He won the career Grand Slam three times over.

But the link was always Au-



Tiger Woods hits on the second fairway during the final round of the Masters golf tournament in Augusta, Ga., in this Sunday, Nov. 15, 2020, file photo.

Associated Press

gusta.

Xander Schauffele was asked the first thought that entered his head when he plays the Masters. He has only played three times, but the answer came quickly. "I see Tiger and I see red," said Schauffele, a runner-up to him in 2019.

Woods' absence is nothing new, only the circumstances. He first missed the Masters in 2014 when he had the first of his five back surgeries. He missed two other times (2016 and 2017) trying to heal from two others.

But there was always belief he would return, even when the pain in his lower back was so bad that he barely could walk at the Masters Club dinner for champions in 2017.

And there was hope he could win again, which he did.

It's different now.

Woods shattered tibia and fibula bones in his right leg in multiple locations from a Feb. 23 crash when his SUV ran off the road and down a hill in the coastal suburbs of Los Angeles. There were

additional broken bones in his ankle and foot, now held together by screws and pins.

He returned home about three weeks ago with no update on his condition. That hasn't kept medical experts from suggesting the nature of his injuries make it unlikely he will play again. Justin Thomas and Rory McIlroy are in a small circle of players who have grown close to Woods and have earned his trust and respect for privacy. Both have dropped by his house to see him.

"Spent a couple hours with him, which was nice. It was good to see him," McIlroy said. "It was good to see him in decent spirits. When you hear of these things and you look at the car and you see the crash, you think he's going to be in a hospital bed for six months.

But he was actually doing better than that."

Thomas feels lucky to get an early invitation to the practice rounds with Woods and Fred Couples. That's what he misses the most about this week.

"I went over and saw him a couple times last week and tried to go over a couple times during the week whenever I'm home and see him," Thomas said. "We texted Friday morning, and he said it's kind of starting to set in. He's bummed he's not here playing practice rounds with us, and we hate it, too."

This week was looked upon as a time to reflect on one of golf's unmatched achievements. It was 20 years ago this week that Woods won the Masters, making him the only player to hold the four professional majors at the same time. McIlroy recalls the hype over the 2015 Masters. He had won the British Open and the PGA Championship the year before, and a green jacket was the final piece of the career Grand Slam. He would always get another chance. To win all four in a row comes around once in a career. Woods faced questions about that for seven months and still won in a tight final round against Phil Mickelson and David Duval.

It's too early to say whether Woods will ever compete again at the Masters. He won a U.S. Open with shredded knee ligaments and two stress fractures. Four back surgeries didn't keep from a green jacket. This might be asking too much, especially now that he's 45 and wasn't showing much form even before his horrific car crash.

"I know he's at home and he's fully focused on the recovery process, and I feel like he's mentally strong enough to get through that," McIlroy said. "And once he does, broken bones heal, he's just got to take it step by step. I know he'd love to be here. And I'm sure he's going to put everything he has into trying to be ready to play here next year." □

